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Dokdo: Lone island

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Dokdo: Lone Island

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Report

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Abstract

Dokdo: Lone Island

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The following report is about my thesis film *Dokdo: Lone island*. The report covers the comprehensive process of filmmaking that I went through, from inception of the idea to finished film. The report details an introduction to the issue of the disputed territory of Dokdo, an island that both South Korea and Japan have claimed since the end of World War Two. The report continues with a visual treatment of the film I intended to make after I finished the production stage, and finishes with a detailed retrospection of each step of filmmaking, concluding with how I developed the film that I ultimately produced.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introductory Treatment

Seoul, South Korea wakes as the sun rises over the surrounding mountains. Uniformly dressed children hold hands as they walk to school, elderly women perform calisthenics in the city parks, and the metropolis begins to buzz to life as ten million men and women make their way to work.

Crowds of young men in Korean military uniform begin to gather outside of the Japanese Embassy to prepare for crowd control. People are holding protest signs with an image of a sheer rock face that is surrounded by a sea of blue. Soon, thousands of people gather and begin to sing the Korean national anthem. A man in traditional Korean clothing screams at the embassy and shreds a Japanese flag, as he demands conference with Shinzō Abe, the Prime Minister of Japan. The crowd looks on as the demonstration is abruptly broken up.

Waves splash and a small rocky island becomes larger and larger as a ferry holding hundreds of South Korean people nears Dokdo, the disputed island. People exit after the eight-hour journey and they are allowed only 30 minutes to take photos and walk around the port of the island before returning. The sound of white water crashing against the rocky shore is soon drowned out by thousands of camera shutters opening and closing.

Figure 1: Thousands of people protest Seoul, South Korea.

"Dokdo" in Korean, and "Takeshima" in Japanese, is a small island that sits in the middle of the sea between South Korea and Japan. Both countries claim its sovereignty, and both can legally prove ownership. This island has been the source of a fervent territorial and political dispute between the two nations since the end of the Japanese occupation of South Korea in 1945, following WWII. Nevertheless, Dokdo's total land area is less than 50 acres. The island has no considerable exploitable resource or territorial significance. More than anything else, Dokdo is a national symbol.

The Japanese occupation meant forced labor, sexual slavery (often referred to as comfort women), and the systematic destruction of Korean culture. Dokdo, the island, has remained as a symbol of this time. Koreans see Dokdo as a source of pride and defiance

in the face of oppression, and many fear that relinquishing ownership of the island would mean losing their national honor and identity.

Every year, thousands of Koreans change their legal addresses to the island of Dokdo in sign of allegiance. In 2011, artists erected a bronze statue of a young girl, representing a ‘comfort woman,’ in front of the Japanese embassy on Seoul. Other more extreme activists demonstrate in public protest by killing green pheasants -national bird of Japan- and spilling their blood on top Japanese flags. The meaning of this island has been reinforced and kept alive through generations of advocates and regular citizens who fight in the name of Dokdo; but many of them have motivations and relationships to the island that are far more complex than the obvious social and international elements.

Dokdo: Lone Island, my film, explores that human and individual side behind the broad political issue, and explores ideals behind nationalism in a country with a strong sense of identity through three main protagonists.

Noh Byeong Man, a quiet farmer and family man, but also one of the most sensationalistic voices of Dokdo, famous for traveling to Tokyo to protest in favor of Korea. He wants Japan to apologize and end all claims to the island. Byeong Man states that he sees Japan as a strong boulder, and he sees himself as an egg: "the boulder will always break the egg, but the boulder will become messy in the process."

Song Gwang Min is a young man who escaped North Korea thanks to his grandfather, who used to be a South Korean soldier. By himself now, Gwang Min lives in South Korea, adapting to the new place, and honoring his grandfather's last wish by protesting for Dokdo along a youth advocacy group.

Choi Kyeong Soon is the daughter of the first ever resident of Dokdo. She grew up, and lived on the island for about 17 years with her father. She now balances raising a family with planning guided tours to Dokdo, and strives to move back to the island against government restrictions.

Using a cinéma vérité approach, the documentary takes an observational approach to the subjects, following their personal journeys on their quest to Dokdo. While many, many films have been made about the island, very few have been made without a largely subjective, political agenda. *Dokdo: Lone Island*, is objective tale, following the personal narratives of three individuals whose sense of self have been constructed around Dokdo, the island.

Chapter 2: Subjects

Figure 2 Noh Byeong Man sprays a farmer's crops with pesticide.

Noh Byeong Man

Byeong Man was raised in the countryside of South Korea and has been a tree farmer his entire life. His knowledge of the land and agriculture as a means to make a living was passed on to him by his father, who harbored a hatred for the Japanese as a result of being forced into manual labor in Japan during the Japanese occupation.

Byeong Man works the land for farmers who own property, which supplies him with a very modest living. Against the wishes of his wife and children, Byeong Man honors his now deceased father by fighting against the Japanese claims over Dokdo. In

June of 2014 he begins planning a trip to Tokyo, where he will aggressively campaign in front of the National Assembly.

Byeong Man states that he sees Japan as a strong boulder, and he sees himself as an egg. The boulder will always break the egg, but the boulder will become messy in the process. He is determined to continue fighting until Japan apologizes and ends all claims to the island.

Figure 3 Byeong Man, his wife, and brother in law travel to his farm.

Through June, Byeong Man and his wife work the farm fields, as it is one of the busier times of the year. As Byeong Man continues to prepare for the trip we see a very intimate view of his life and of how his choices have put a strain on his relationships.

July comes quickly, and he is ready for Tokyo. Byeong Man makes his way from the countryside to Busan, South Korea. He packs a traditional Korean outfit that has claims to Dokdo penned on every inch of the cloth. His wife is not happy with him leaving, but she packs him homemade traditional Korean food. Byeong Man travels by bus, taxi and train before taking the plane at the Busan International Airport. He arrives to a Korean run hostel in Tokyo to gather energy.

The following day Byeong Man realizes the weather will not be good for his protests, but it has to happen now regardless. Within seconds, he is rushing into the subway system of Tokyo. Though he does not understand Japanese, he somehow makes his way to the National Assembly. The police have already been tipped; a group of 30 officers in uniform waits at the top of the street exit. Noh Byeong Man who is small in stature and subdued, takes on a completely new identity.

Surrounded by police, Byeong Man demands to speak to Shinzō Abe, the Prime Minister of Japan. The police soon escort him off of the premises. For the rest of the week undercover government police follows him, but when finally able to protest, the weather turns against him, and most of his protests go unseen as the public avoids rain in the streets.

After a week of effort, Byeong Man returns to his home. He continues with his routine of working the orchards, keeping his father in mind, but he also plans to protest in Seoul, in front of the Japanese Embassy, in the following days. During this crowded protest he will be arrested for disturbing the peace.

Figure 4 Byeong Man begins his protest.


Figure 5 Japanese police force Byeong Man to leave.

Figure 6 Choi Kyeong Soon shares where she grew up on Dokdo.

Choi Kyeong Soon:

Kyeong Soon lives in a city just outside the Seoul Metro, where she raises her children and works as an office manager at her husband's road construction business. She has lived in the Seoul area for the last 20 years, but years ago she was one of the only people who lived on Dokdo for an extended period of time. Her father was the first permanent resident of Dokdo. For many years he worked on the island as a fisherman, and spent winters in the neighboring island of Ulleungdo. Kyeong Soon, whose parents separated when she was young, was forced to live with her father as an adolescent. She often struggled in school, and even fought with her peers. Sending her to live on Dokdo was her family's solution for these issues.

Today, almost all Korean people know the name Kim Sung Do, the current resident of Dokdo; but few know of Kyeong Soon's father. She has made it her goal to educate people about what he accomplished while living on Dokdo. Although she did not like growing up in the island, she still has a strong connection to it, and longs to move back to it.

In May 2014, Kyeong Soon plans to lead a group trip to the island in her free time, which she has little of--she is raising a family and working full time. Her pride for her father drives her to lead tours to Dokdo and speak about her father so he is not forgotten in the history of the island. Through this month she also attempts to instill her pride for her father and the island in the rest of her family, but it becomes a major source of tension. Some of her children feel she expects too much out of them, and they do not feel a connection to the island as she does. Her eldest daughter, specially, feels her mother is forcing her into something that she does not feel passionate about.

The May Dokdo trip comes quickly. Many people have signed up to travel with Kyeong Soon due to the special access she has to the Island : instead of the restricted 30 minutes, Kyeong soon can stay there for 4 hours. The Ferry to Ulleungdo, an island between the Dokdo and Korea, begins. There is a variety of people from all regions of Korea and from different generations. The group will stay on Ulleungdo for one night, as a halfway stop before Dokdo, and will continue their way in the morning.

Kyeong Soon begins leading a tour of Ulleungdo while educating the tour group about her father. Half way through the tour, rumors start to spread that the ferry to Dokdo is canceled due to bad weather the following day. With the possibility of not being able to

make it to Dokdo, people begin to criticize Kyeong Soon for the price of the trip and argue that she is taking advantage of her special status.

The Ferry to the island is cancelled, but they are still able to circle the island of Dokdo. Kyeong Soon becomes deeply frustrated leading these large groups, since most of the tourists just want a photo with Dokdo in the background, and they are not actually there to learn about the history of her father's relationship with Dodko. She does not go on with the tour, and decides to stay in the hotel.

Two weeks later, we return to Dokdo on a personal trip with Kyeong Soon. She wants to show her son where she grew up and the structures that were built by his grandfather. However, the military outpost on the island is now restricting where she can go. Crushed, Kyeong Soon just wants to return home.

Despite the tension in her family, and her disastrous first group trip to the island, Choi continues her fight to legitimize her father's legacy. After returning from Dokdo, she quickly begins to organize another group trip. She continues to hope she can pass down this family business to her children who remain resistant do not share her passion for Dokdo.

Figure 7 Song Gwang Min attending a high school.

Song Gwang Min:

Gwang Min was able to escape North Korea thanks to his grandfather, who was once a South Korean soldier captured during the war. Gwang Min's grandfather was the only family member present as he adapted to a new life in South Korea. When his grandfather passed away, Gwang Min was left with nothing but a wish written in his grandfather's will. It was that someone in his family would fight for the South Korean nation, like he once had. For years, Gwang Min wanted nothing more than to serve the country of South Korea by joining the military, as his grandfather did, but his dreams were soon destroyed when he found out it is against the law for a former North Korean to join the South Korean military.

It is incredibly difficult for North Korean refugees to adapt to the hyper competitive culture that has developed in the South. Gwang Min currently attends a school for North Korean refugees, which helps them adapt into everyday life in the South. It was there that he first discovered the almost unanimous passion that South Korean people hold for the Island of Dokdo. The island is an issue in North Korea as well, but it is much stronger in the South. Gwang Min realized that Dokdo was the way for him to transition into the new society while fulfilling his grandfather's last wish.

In July, Gwang Min began to prepare for his first trip to Dokdo along with an advocate organization that welcomingly received him as a member. Members of the group include his friend Su Nam, and several South Korean Students. During their stay in Ulleungdo, the group suddenly decides to film a dance flash mob on Dokdo; however, Gwang Min struggles because he cannot keep up with the dance practice. In South Korean education, dancing and singing are part of the curriculum; but this is not the case in North Korea. Gwang Min is immediately isolated due to his lack of dancing ability, but he continues to practice his moves until they are perfected.

Figure 8 Gwang Min apologizes to his grandfather.

The following morning the group of students gets the unfortunate news that the ferry is canceled due to inclement weather. Gwang Min and his group have to compromise with dancing in front of different tourist attractions on Ulleungdo. In place of Dokdo, they will later present their dance at the Korean Congressional Building. Back in South Korea, Gwang Min travels to the grave of his grandfather at the National Cemetery for Veterans in Daejeon. He cleans and decorates his grandfather's headstone, and promises that he will continue to support Dokdo in any way he can.

Figure 9 Dodko in the distance.

Dokdo: Lone Island explores how a symbol can drive us to do incredible things, even if the end result may be fruitless. The stories in this film are united by one small, secluded island, but they are less about the island itself and more about the people, the pride, and the fervor that can arise from a strong sense of place and identity.

Chapter 3: Preproduction

My interest in Dokdo stems from a three-year period when I lived in Korea working as an ESL teacher from 2009-2012. I developed close relationships in my community that allowed me to better understand the culture. My first encounter with the story of Dokdo was after witnessing a protest during a visit to Seoul, located near the Japanese Consulate. Korean military veterans held bleeding carcasses of ring neck pheasants, the national bird of Japan, over the rising sun flag of the Japanese Empire. I was shocked. It took years and many long conversations with Korean friends before I was able to establish an honest empathy for the pain and anger I saw in the eyes of those protesters.

Everyone I met in Korea had strong opinions about Dokdo, which increased my interest in learning more about Korean culture and Dokdo's history. In 2012 I returned to the US to pursue a Master of Fine Arts in Radio-Television-Film at the University of Texas, with concentration in documentary. After my transition to the United States, the idea for this film stuck with me.

Although there is a vast amount of research detailing who the island actually belongs to, I chose not to do extensive research on this topic. The research that I became familiar with pointed to the fact that a scholar could make a valid case for either country. The passion behind the Korean viewpoint on the dispute was what resonated with me on an emotional level because they were the occupied people. The fight for Dokdo was not a fight for the physical land, but an impossible fight for honor and identity lost in past centuries.

As with my past documentaries I decided to not focus on the politics or the immediate conflicts. Instead I would use the film to explore the lives of people who are actively shaped by the dispute over Dokdo and also influenced the discussion themselves.

The first real challenge when it came to organizing a film of this scope was finding subjects who would be willing to be on camera for months at a time and the fact that I attempted to do this from across the world. It was fortunate that I still had a great support system from my time living in South Korea. My wife, Ga Young, who is South Korean generously agreed to help me produce this film. Without her incredible commitment and hard work I am certain this film would never have been made. In December of 2014 Ga Young began compiling a list of people who were heavily involved with the Dokdo issue. The list of potential subjects quickly became divided into two separate groups. There were large organizations that operated tour groups that would operate guided trips to the island and also provided accommodations on the intermediary island of Ulleungdo. There were also individuals who seemed to have their own private reasons for being invested in the territorial dispute. The individuals who fought to keep Dokdo as Korean territories mostly seemed to be connected to the island through the larger issue of anti-Japanese sentiment left over from the occupation before and during WWII. These individuals were the sons and daughters of women forced into sexual slavery and men who were shipped as slaves to mainland Japan and its occupied territories to work in forced labor camps. It was these individuals that immediately piqued my interest, but I still wanted to meet with the larger organizations.

The second challenge was finding crew that would be willing to leave the United States for months at a time and also share my values when it came to the documentary film process. Ga Young had never worked in film before but I knew she would be perfect as a producer because of her past experiences as the director of an English school in Korea. Not only was she incredibly organized and detailed in her work, but also she was comfortable working as a liaison for foreigners working in South Korea. Ga Young was able to understand my vision but also empathize with the Korean perspective when it came to the disputed territory of Dokdo. In Korea there is an incredible amount of passion behind the dispute and I would sometimes lose sight of the sensitivity of the issue. Ga Young was able to guide me through my ignorance on more than one occasion.

For each of my past documentary films, I served as the director and cinematographer. I decided that with the language barrier and the complexity of this shoot that I could not be the main cinematographer. It was very important for me to find someone to shoot my film that I could trust with the overall aesthetic of it. I had asked Juan Pablo González, one of the other MFA students in my program, to be a camera operator for a month of the shoot. I had previously worked with Juan Pablo on the two other documentary films that I produced for the MFA program at the University of Texas, and he always proved to have sharp intuition for the visuals in each moment of shooting. During my previous documentary shoot with Juan Pablo I was working on a film that was much more intimate to my own life. I produced a film about a hunting shack fifty miles north of the small mining town of Chisholm, Minnesota that my grandfather bought with his friends after returning from WWII. Due to the fact that the subject of the film was

very close to me, sometimes I would lose perspective on what may be important to shoot and explain visually for someone not as familiar with the context of the people and place as I was. There were things that I would take for granted as unimportant because I had grown up surrounded by this culture. With sensitivity and a firm understanding of his surroundings Juan Pablo was able to capture shots that I would have overlooked. Many of these shots would ultimately make the final cut of the film and I believe that it made the film a much stronger piece.

I wanted to ask Juan Pablo to be the cinematographer on the shoot, but I was hesitant because he could only be there for one out of the four months that we had planned to shoot. When I proposed the idea to him, I expressed my concern of his limitation of time. I was delighted when he agreed to stay in Korea and Japan for an extra month. I felt more confident knowing I would be collaborating with someone that I would not only be able to trust completely as a skilled cinematographer, but also someone that I would be able to discuss the themes and narratives that we would explore with this documentary while we were in the production stage.

Starting in the January of 2014 Ga Young and I began to get everything organized in order to have a successful shoot. I was able to rent the same apartment that I had lived in two years previously and my landlord graciously gave me a large discount because she wanted to support my effort in making a documentary about the Dokdo issue. We also were able to get a significant discount on a used car because of the subject of the film. Every time we were shown charity because of the subject of the film it felt a little precarious to me because I had no idea yet how the film would take shape. Ga Young

had been in contact with some very radical individuals that took their protesting to a sensationalistic extreme. I often worried whether the film I was about to make would be seen as embarrassing or insulting from the viewpoint of Korean people. Years earlier I had found myself lost in the sensationalistic violence; and it was not until I had participated in many long conversations with Korean friends about Dokdo and really reflected on the historical relationship Korea has with Japan that I honestly felt empathy for the protesters I once only saw as "crazy". The last thing I wanted to produce was a film that showed the world a sensationalistic view of a very complex issue. I have always been disinterested in that type of filmmaking. On the other end of the spectrum I did not want to make a propaganda film for South Korea, which I believe was the assumption of many Korean people who heard about me making this film. I felt intimidated by the prospect of this shoot, but I was still enthusiastic.

Chapter 4: Production

May

We arrived in Seoul, South Korea at the beginning of May 2014 and immediately started making appointments with prospective subjects. My crew at this point consisted of Ga Young, Juan Pablo and two other gradate students from my program. I thought it would be good for everyone to join in on the meetings as a way to become comfortable with Korean culture and customs and also introduce the idea to potential subjects of having a film crew around them. This proved to not be a good idea as sometimes the meetings went on much longer than I anticipated and I did not give nearly enough downtime to my crew. In retrospect, I would have gone to the meetings with Ga Young and invited others to join if they wanted to. By the time we made it to our final destination in Daegu, South Korea everyone was exhausted from meetings and jetlag, and there was concern about whether the rest of the summer months would be as grueling as the first week. I believe that my lack of communication was a real detriment to the production at this point. There were too many moving parts for me to keep track of and I was also concerned because several of the meetings we went to ended with subjects opting out of being in front of the camera for several months.

After a few days of rest we drove to Namwon, a small farming city in the southwestern part of the Korean peninsula. Ga Young had planned a meeting with Noh Byeong Man, a farmer who was well known in the Dokdo protest circles for protesting in front of the National Assembly in Tokyo.

Earlier in February of 2014, I was able to organize a second unit crew to shoot a protest in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul. During this protest Byeong Man was arrested for demanding conference with someone at the embassy. When he was denied conference he rushed the police and when that did not work he threw his shoes at the embassy. My second unit crew was able to shoot some very impressive footage. Byeong Man stands at about five foot three inches, but when he is protesting in his traditional Korean shroud, he seems larger than life.

Figure 10 Noh Byeong Man in uniform.

When we arrived in Namwon in May, it was difficult to recognize Byeong Man from the footage that I had seen. He was a man of small stature and very soft-spoken. On

the first day in Namwon we shot for about an hour as Byeong Man harvested fresh greens from his field so that we could all have a meal together that evening. We ate dinner at our hotel and Byeong Man told us of the history of Namwon and the Japanese. He detailed that the people of Namwon were famous for their rebellion against the Japanese during the occupation of the sixteenth century. He told us that we must visit the tomb on the outskirts of town and that it was a famous tourist attraction. This tomb was the final resting place of over twenty thousand noses of Korean people who had been killed during the occupation. The Japanese military not only massacred the rebels but killed civilians as well. The noses were kept as keepsakes and were only returned to South Korea in 1992. Byeong Man also told us of the tomb of the ears that still exists in Kyoto to this day. Personally, as someone ignorant to this history it seemed outrageous that these ears would not be returned. Noh Byeong Man then began to talk about how his father was taken to Japan at seventeen years old and forced to work in a mine on a remote island. His anger and frustration no longer seemed foreign.

We film Noh Byeong Man for the next few days and I can begin to see scenes take shape as I go through the footage at the end of the day. I am relieved that we have a subject that I know will be a strong character in the documentary.

The footage itself looks great. Juan Pablo and I had discussed a shooting strategy of trying to keep everything stationary for the time we spend in the country so that there is a significant contrast to the footage we plan on shooting during the more chaotic protests. The interviews were informal without external lighting sources and are shot while Noh Byeong Man is actively doing his day-to-day work. Everything looks and

sounds great. We plan to come back to Namwon at the beginning of July to film Byeong Man as he prepares for his next protest in Japan.

June

After several days on break in Daegu, we make our way back to Seoul to meet two of our potential subjects. We are going to meet Song Gwang Min, a North Korean Refugee who advocates for Dokdo, and is currently residing at school for North Korean refugees in a city adjacent to Seoul. We also will be meeting Choi Kyeong soon, a woman who lived on Dokdo when she was a child.

As we make our way to the school that Gwang Min attends it becomes apparent that Anseong, the city where his school is located, is much smaller than we expected. As we drive into town it seems there are no sleeping accommodations, which is quite stressful. We also have trouble with the school administration that previously had given us permission to shoot on site at the school. They were under the impression that we were with an American television program and now want to take away our access to the film at the school. We reach a compromise and they agree to let us film for two days, but we will not be able to return.

This was a significant challenge because we had no time to introduce ourselves properly to Gwang Min. Fortunately, it seems that it is not uncommon for there to be television cameras at the school and most of the students, including Gwang Min, are very comfortable being around the media.

The next two days go incredibly well. We follow Gwang Min from class to class and we are able to catch some great candid interactions with his classmates. Gwang Min is quiet but articulate and he tells us how he escaped from North Korea. He wanted to join his grandfather who escaped the previous year. His South Korean grandfather was a prisoner of war, captured by North Korean forces during the Korean War. His one wish for Gwang Min was for him to join the South Korean Military just as he had when he was Gwan Min's age. Unfortunately, Gwang Min's grandfather died soon after they were able to reunite in South Korea, which left Gwang Min an orphan in a foreign country. It is around this time that Gwang Min also finds out that North Korean refugees are barred form ever joining the South Korean military. When he hears of the Dokdo issue, he believes it to be the only way he can still fight for his adopted country and honor his grandfather.

The shoot with Gwang Min is a tough story to hear, but it resonates with the themes of identity that originally attracted me to this subject. I begin to see parallels between his narrative and Noh Byeong Man's. Both want to honor their ancestors and are doing it the only way that they know how. We make a schedule with Gwang Min to film him as he makes his first trip to the Island of Dokdo.

We were incredibly fortunate in the fact that one of the cooks in the cafeteria heard that we could not find a hotel and invites us to sleep at her place. Her husband cooks us pork ribs and brings out his good bottle of ginseng soju. After a few drinks our host brings out his laptop and asks us to sing for him. He starts it off by signing a few Elton John songs into his spoon, which he is holding in place of a microphone. The spoon

gets passed around a few times and we serenade him. It may seem like an insignificant point in the larger scope of the film, but after several long days of shooting it was a large morale boost.

After leaving Anseong we make our way to Gwangju, where Choi Kyeong Soon lives. She immediately shares with us the story of her father and how he was the first permanent resident of Dokdo. She explains that the government of South Korea states that her claim is illegitimate, but they never have explained why. She lived there with her father when she was a rebellious teenager. Her father kept her there to stay out of trouble and it was not until after his death that she began to long for the place where she had spent so much time with him.

Kyeong Soon runs an organization with her family that brings people to Dokdo and educates them about her father's legacy. Again, I am able to see a pattern with how Dokdo plays a significant part in the identity of one of the people that I plan on following. She is connected to the island and it is her tool to preserve her father's legacy.

Later in June we follow her on a trip to Dokdo leading a tour group. Kyeong Soon has special governmental privilege to stay on the island beyond the allowed thirty minutes made available to the rest of the South Korean public. This is one of the main features that attract people to her organization. She struggles to teach people about her father and his history on Dokdo because most of the tour attendees are only interested in the political dispute and her privilege to let them stay on the island for an extended period of time. The trip is complicated further by bad weather, which ultimately prevents the

tour group from stepping foot on the island. Most of the people in the tour take their anger out on Kyeong Soon, even though there is no way she could have anticipated the weather. At this point the port agent lets Ga Young know that only half of the ferries that are scheduled actually make it to the island, most being forced to turn back because of bad weather.

The ferry leaves port with permission to circle the island, but not dock. After three hours at rough sea most of my crew is ill, but when we arrive I am surprised by how impressive the island is. It is truly isolated in the middle of the East Sea (Sea of Japan).

One week later we return to Dokdo with Kyeong Soon and her son. This time she has returned without a tour group, and only has come to share her experiences with her son. I have a feeling it was also for our benefit, which was very kind of her. Kyeong soon walks her son around the island telling him about his grandfather and stories from her past. At one point we split up into two groups. Juan Pablo stays with Kyeong Soon, and Gayoung and I start to climb to the top of the Island to grab a scenic shot. After about half of an hour filming from the top of the mountain Kyeong Soon's son finds us and explains that we must immediately leave where we are. Ga Young explains to him that the Dokdo gaurd gave us permission to shoot from that spot. He warns us that his mother is upset about our actions and we must leave now.

When we get to the bottom of the mountain, Kyeong Soon is in tears, but it is not because we went to the top of the mountain, but because we were given permission to go to an area where she is not allowed. She expresses her frustrations with the police who no longer allow her to visit places where she was able to travel to as a child. With her

permission we record an interview about why she is upset and soon after depart for the mainland of Korea.

July

At the beginning of July Juan Pablo and Ga young are the only people left from the original crew. Two filmmakers I became friends with while living in South Korea join our crew and immediately breathe new life into the shoot. It has been an exhausting two months and their enthusiasm is refreshing. This ended up happening at a fortunate time, as we were about to travel to Tokyo with Noh Byeong Man.

We met Byeong Man in Namwon and made our way to the Busan airport. As soon as we arrived in Tokyo, undercover Japanese government agents start following us. I initially assumed that they were assigned to make sure Noh Byeong Man would not cause any trouble, but after we met with our Japanese translator he informed us that they told him they were assigned to keep Noh Byeong Man safe. They did not want anything to happen to Noh Byeong Man that may bring him more media attention.

On the second day we explored Tokyo with the cameras and recorded a dozen vox pop interviews. I was surprised by the diverse spectrum of opinions we were able to record. In general it seems that it is mostly the older generation that has strong opinions when it comes to the Island of Dokdo. Most of the younger people that we interviewed did not have an opinion or did not know the issue even existed. The fact that the younger generation was ignorant to the issue infuriated Noh Byeong Man, and confirmed his beliefs that the occupation of Korea was not being properly taught in Japanese textbooks.

Noh Byeong Man protested for three days in front of the National Assembly of Japan. Each day became a little more aggressive. On our last day in Tokyo the Japanese police physically attempted to move Byeong Man back and he retaliated in kind. After being swarmed by over two-dozen police officers, they completely encircled his protest in what looked like an attempt to hide him from the public. We left Japan that evening. Byeong Man shared that he was content with his mission, but it was difficult to see what impact he had, if any.

Juan Pablo returned to the United States from Japan. I was sad to see him go, but as the cinematographer he instructed the crewmembers replacing him the rules that we had come up with for the visual aesthetics of the film. Although I had made mistakes earlier in the shoot regarding communication with crew, I learned how invaluable and rewarding a collaborative relationship with a good cinematographer could be.

August

At the beginning of August we meet with Gwang Min who is preparing for first his trip to Dokdo. He is traveling with an organization called *I Love Dokdo*. One of the goals of their trip is to create a viral video that shows Korean pride for Dokdo. Gwang Min's group decides to do a dance sequence, and as they practice it is obvious that learning how to dance might be a part of South Korean school curriculum, but probably not for North Korean schools. Gwang Min seems out of place.

I am becoming concerned with how Gwang Min will fit into an overall narrative in my film. And to make matters worse, the weather is bad and the trip to Dokdo is cancelled.

We return to the mainland with Gwang Min and proceed to visit the gravesite of his grandfather. Gwang Min apologizes to him and cleans the headstone. The scene in the cemetery is moving and beautifully shot.

Ga Young leaves Korea to go back to school halfway through August. I spend the rest of the month traveling around Korea to shoot pick up shots of scenery and time-lapse footage. I make one more trip to Dokdo and am able to record some stunning footage of the Island. As August closes, I have completely burned out. Over the last four months I have taken a total of twelve days off and I am starting to feel it.

I leave Korea with mixed feelings about the shoot and am intimidated to start the editing process. We have collected over two hundred hours of footage containing three separate languages.

Chapter 5: Post Production

The original plan for my thesis film was to produce a fifty-minute cut that would intertwine several narratives. When I arrived back in Austin I quickly realized that I had greatly underestimated the amount of time that I would need to spend in postproduction. While in Korea I was able have one half of the footage transcribed and translated. My knowledge of the Korean language was not fluent enough for me to edit directly from the footage, so in order to continue logging I needed to continue the transcription and translation process.

Transcoding the footage in order to bring proxy files into Avid Media Composer, my editing software, also took longer than I expected. It would take nearly the entire semester to transcode and sync audio for all of the footage. It was at this point that I decided to scale back the project in order to work with a manageable amount material. I also had concerns of whether I could form a solid narrative structure with the footage I recorded of Gwang Min. I decided to focus on the narrative of Noh Byeong Man as it was the most clear narrative in my mind and we had already focused the translation efforts on his story.

Over the winter break I was introduced to Christina Kim, a former student at the University of Texas. She had recently finished editing a feature documentary for Nancy Schiesari, one of the professors within the RTF Department. I contacted Christina to ask if she would be interested in working with me on my film. Christina was born in South Korea, but had moved when she was in middle school. The fact that she had an intimate knowledge of the dispute over Dokdo and the Japanese occupation of Korea, but had

been removed from it for years made her a perfect candidate as an editor in my mind. She had strong feelings about the issue, but had a level of objectivity that is difficult to find in people who have lived in Korea for their entire lives.

Christina agreed to help me edit the short version of Dokdo and continue on a feature version once I finished the MFA program. In an incredible stroke of luck Christina was not only able to speak Korean and English, but Japanese as well. We worked together over the course of a year to narrow down the footage of Noh Byeong Man to just over three hours. When we had this sequence assembled, Christina transferred it over to me with subtitles in place for editing.

Noh Byeong Man was a challenging subject to edit, especially for an American audience because there is not a built on context around the issue of Dokdo in the United States. When I talked about the issue of Dokdo and even showed clips of Noh Byeong Man to peers, most perceived him as a one-dimensional, insane figure. This was exactly what I was trying to avoid in the production of this film. I wanted to portray him as a complex and possibly tragic figure, but I needed to create a structure where he would be more universally relatable. The obvious strategy for me was to focus on the pain he felt from his father being taken as a slave to work in Japan. I often disagreed with the way Noh Byeong Man acted while he was protesting, but I cannot imagine the pain and anger he felt. It was also important for me to make the Japanese occupation of Korea clear to a foreign audience and create a direct bridge to why Dokdo is important as a symbol of that time for the Korean people.

I began restructuring the cut so that we begin with Noh Byeong Man in the field working. The film cuts to an interview of him talking about his relationship to Korea, his father, and Dokdo. From here we move to the island and show a ferry filled with hundreds of Korean people making the pilgrimage to Dokdo. Through vox pop interview of people visiting the island the film attempts to contextualize the issue. From there the film jumps to a protest in Seoul in front of the Japanese embassy and continues with more vox pop interview. It takes about six minutes before we were able to get back to Noh Byeong Man. After screening this cut several times it became clear that we needed to get back to Noh Byeong Man faster. This cut of the film made it feel unclear who the protagonist was.

The other challenge I was having with the cut was the sequence of Noh Byeong Man protesting in Tokyo. It was too long and was actually becoming boring due to the redundancy in the protests. I had cut this scene together as it was shot. There were three separate days of protest, so I cut it as such.

In the next and final cut I was able to address both of these issues. In the first act of the film I trimmed the vox pop interviews from eight people to four people. I also cut in a sequence of Noh Byeong Man arriving in Seoul on his way to the protest. Instead of leaving him for six minutes he is only off screen for three.

The sequence of protesting in Japan was more problematic for me. It was only after I discussed the scene with Juan Pablo and then Christina, that I was able to find a solution. Juan Pablo suggested that I cut all of the protests together into one day. After several revisions of the scene, passing it back and forth between Christina and myself we

were able to arrive at where the film is now. I realize now that I had a difficult time removing myself from the shoot and the linear nature I thought the edit should unfold.

The process took a long time, but I arrived at a cut that I feel represents the disputed territory of Dokdo and Noh Byeong man fairly. The entire process of making this film was a series of successes and failures, but the more I reflect on it, it was both success and failure that shaped the film into something that I am incredibly proud of.

I would also like to say that the support that I have received during the MFA program at the University of Texas has been incredible. I have learned that creating documentary film can be both physically and emotionally taxing and I cannot imagine producing the films that I have without the guidance of the faculty and community in this department. It is a rare gift being able to create film surrounded by people who are truly passionate about documentary and also education.